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## ECUMENICAL 'FUTURE OF MINISTRY' CONFERENCE HELD

by Allen L. Bartlett, Jr., Dean  
Christ Church Cathedral, Louisville, Ky.

TORONTO -- "You and I are children of apocalypse," the Very Rev. Herbert O'Driscoll said to 221 persons from more than a dozen denominations at a North American Conference on the Future of Ministry. The conference, subtitled "Toward Creative Ministry in an Age of Ambiguity," was an attempt to focus ecumenical resources on the 1980s and 1990s, in terms of the ambiguities of changing world, changing churches, and changing ministries.

Meeting in Toronto October 7-10, the conference first heard the Rev. John Fletcher spell out in grim detail the major implications of the Global 2000 report. Dr. Fletcher, who is with the Alban Institute for Theological Education and the National Institute of Health, both in Washington, D.C., outlined this first attempt by the U.S. government to make long-term quantitative projections across the range of population, resource, and environmental concerns.

His projection was that "unless present trends change," the world in the year 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically, and more vulnerable to destruction than at present. He spoke within the framework of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done on earth: what earth?" . . . "Our daily bread. . . what is daily bread?" He pointed up the report's words, "unless present trends change," saying that this is where the Church, with its twin concerns for love and justice, comes in.

It was Dean O'Driscoll of the Anglican Cathedral in Vancouver, Canada, who electrified the participants in his addresses rich in biblical, historical, literary, and mythological allusions. He characterized the Christian community in the next decades as children of apocalypse, earthquake, and wilderness. As has been occasionally true in history, "This is a time of chasm," he said, "a time of ambivalence, violence and ambiguity."

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This will be a time of blinding light that reveals things for what they are, a time of no hiding place, a time having cosmic effect, and of utter complexity and confusing pluralism. "Pluralism is always there in apocalypse. In a strange way, the Tower of Babel is the only tower left standing. All we do is done in its shadow." Quoting the Russian author Solzhenitsyn, he said that many hours have struck simultaneously on the clock of history.

O'Driscoll's message was ultimately strongly hopeful, however. He said that we are children of Covenant, and the Covenant is always being made. "The pain of our time is the pain of pregnancy, not malignancy," Drawing on J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy, O'Driscoll quoted the reluctant hesitant, Frodo about to undertake his journey with grave misgivings, "I will take the ring, though I do not know the way." O'Driscoll challenged the conference participants, "Take the ring!"

All of the conference participants spent eight hours in 17 issue exploration groups, in such areas as the "Task of Theology Today," "Ministry in a Changing Economy," "The Church in Revolutionary Society," "Ministries In and To the Dominant Structures," "Clergy Women in a Changing Church," "Myth, Meaning, and Pluralism," "Futuring as a Planning Skill," "Ministry in Historical Perspective," "Ministry of the Laity," "The Small Congregation," "In Support of Ministry," "Marriage and Family Caught in Changing Lifestyles." The group leaders came from many U.S. and Canadian seminaries. They also included Archbishop Edward W. Scott, the Anglican Primate of Canada.

Each denominational grouping met in several sessions toward the close of the conference, to design appropriate ways of making an impact on denominational and institutional structures. The conference was designed by the Canadian Council of Churches, and the Program Committee for Professional Church Leadership of the National Council of Churches (USA).

Participating denominations included the American Baptist Churches, Anglican Church of Canada, Baptist Federation of Canada, Church of the Brethren, Christian Church (Disciples), Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church U.S., United Church of Canada, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, United Presbyterian Church USA.

Frequent worship was a part of the conference. The Eucharist was offered on successive days in the early mornings, in Free Church, Reformed, and Anglican styles.



The Episcopal delegation was headed by Fredrica Harris Thompsett and the Rev. Charles H. Long, Jr. Other Episcopal participants were Dr. Charles Lawrence, Dr. Anne Harrison, the Rev. Harold Lewis, Dorothy J. Brittany, Dr. Charity Waymouth, the Rev. Barbara Schlacter, the Rev. Jay Lowery, and the Very Rev. Allen Bartlett.

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